

# HISTORY OF SUTHERLAND SHIRE

## SHIRE FACT

During the *Endeavour's* brief stay, a Scottish seaman named 'Forby' Sutherland died from illness and was buried on the beach at Kurnell. Lieutenant Cook named the northwest point 'Point Sutherland' in his memory.

Aboriginal people have most probably been in the Sydney/Illawarra coastal areas about 7,000 years before the arrival of Lieutenant Cook in 1770.

Before the arrival of the Europeans, Australian Aboriginals called the 'Dharawal' people lived in the area which stretched from the south-eastern shore of Sydney Harbour as far south as the Shoalhaven River and west to Mossvale.

### Cook's arrival

Sutherland Shire is known as the 'birthplace of modern Australia', as Kurnell (now a suburb of the Shire) was the first landing site on the east coast of Australia by James Cook in 1770 in the ship '*Endeavour*'.

Cook suggested the Botany Bay area to the British Government as a possible site for future settlement, but when the first fleet arrived in 1788, Captain Arthur Phillip chose Port Jackson (now called Sydney Harbour) instead due to its better shelter for shipping and supply of water.

### First European settlers

Captain James Birnie took up the first land grant in 1815 at Kurnell. Settlement continued slowly, with only approximately 1,500 people living in the area 100 years later when the Shire was proclaimed.

The area now called Sutherland Shire was officially founded by Government Proclamation in 1906. Sutherland Shire is located on the southern coastal edge of Sydney, surrounded by waterways and bushland. The boundaries are the Georges River in the north, Deadman's Creek down to Woronora Dam in the west, from the dam across through the Royal National Park to Garie Beach in the south, and the Pacific Ocean in the east.

### A growing Shire

A few farmers, woodcutters and fishermen lived in the area. The population increase began with the arrival of the first steam train to Sutherland on 26 December 1885 and the continued release of crown (government) lands. In 1921 the population had reached 7,990 and in 1939 it was 19,566. By 1951 it had risen to 50,150, jumping to 111,746 in 1961 and 153,250 in 1971.

## Shire services

Except for people around Miranda who were able to use water from the steam tram (1911-1931/32) service's standpipe, most Shire residents relied on tank water for domestic uses in the early days. Most parts of the Shire had access to laid on water from 1931 following construction of the Woronora Dam.

Cronulla had a limited electricity supply from 1917, which was generated privately by Mr A T Robinson. From 1926 electricity was made available throughout the Shire administered by the council. The provision of service was transferred to the Sydney County Council in 1955.

In 1926 the railway from Sydney to Sutherland was electrified. The railway line was extended from Sutherland to Cronulla in 1939. Today the train network covers the central and eastern parts of the Shire and has 13 railway stations.

Today, Sutherland Shire is an attractive blend of ocean beaches, waterways, parklands and residential suburbs on the southern limits of the Sydney, with a population of 215,084 residents (June 2003 Australian Bureau of Statistics).

### Australia's oldest

The Shire has vast areas of native bushland, which includes part of the Royal National Park. This was Australia's first national park and was officially opened on 26 April 1879. It is the second oldest national park in the world after Yellowstone National Park in the United States.



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Lieutenant Cook's companions, the botanists Joseph Banks and Dr Carl Solander, were delighted by the beauty of the native flowers and bushland of the Shire and collected many samples to take back to London. Cook named Botany Bay in honour of their important discoveries.

The Shire now includes large parts of four national parks: Botany Bay National Park (which includes the site of Captain Cook's landing place); Royal National Park; Heathcote National Park; and Georges River National Park. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service is in charge of these areas.

### Boom time

A population boom occurred in the 1950s with an increase in housing areas and later the creation of new suburbs in the Shire.

Associated with this population growth was residential, industrial and commercial development. Gone were the country townships of one street shops; in their place have risen large modern shopping centres.

These days, the regional retail centre is at Miranda, with district centres at Caringbah, Sylvania, Engadine, Cronulla, Gymea, Sutherland, Menai and Jannali. Westfield Shoppingtown Miranda is one of the largest complexes of its type in the Southern Hemisphere.

Located on Kurnell Peninsula along with other industrial complexes, Caltex Refining Company is the biggest industrial complex in the Shire and is one of the largest refineries in Australia. Other industrial areas are at Taren Point, Kirrawee and Heathcote.

### Schools

The first school in the Shire was opened on 16 February 1884 to serve children living at the Como railway construction camp. When World War II came to a close, the only secondary school in the Shire was the Sutherland Intermediate High School, taking pupils to form three only.

The Shire now has 79 schools within its boundaries, of which 69 are public, as well as the Sutherland College of Technical and Further Education's campuses at Gymea and Loftus.

*\*See the Local Studies Collection at Sutherland Library as a source of further information.*



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